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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the gaming techniques used at the University of San Francisco Counseling Center to enhance growth and to evaluate the training of professional and paraprofessional staff in the areas of crisis intervention, student services, and self-awareness. Gaming is defined as an exercise in which people either act as themselves or play simulated roles in actual or simulated environments. Three basic game types are described: (1) Coalition games involve cooperative solutions by players and are used for values clarification and group decision making; (2) Racing games involve participants in attempts to "finish" as fast as possible and are used in pre- and post-training evaluations; and (3) Scenarios involve developing solutions or testing present or future rules and procedures and are used to evaluate knowledge and learning based on training. Five factors to be considered in developing learning or evaluation games are delineated (reframing, reality, involvement, insight, and motivation); and four components to be considered in game design are described: goal of the game, measure of outcome, rules of the game, and payoff for the game. Finally, two series of questions are presented which allow participants to evaluate the effectiveness of the games. (MCF)

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Games as Growth and Evaluation Techniques

by

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In an effort to enhance the growth of student participation in our training programs, and to evaluate these training techniques of the University of San Francisco Counseling Center, we started researching and evaluating various new and innovative growth and evaluation techniques. During this research it seemed appropriate to ask the question, "What would people rather do, work or play?" When the staff was polled, they all answered "Play." The next question was, "Play at what?" The answer was "Games." During the last two years we have been employing games or gaming techniques in enhancing growth, training and evaluating students, paraprofessionals and professional staff in the areas of crisis intervention, student services and self awareness.

Gaming is defined as an exercise employing human beings acting as themselves or playing simulated roles in an environment which is either actual or simulated. The players may participate as subjects being observed for training or evaluation purposes. The type of games used by the Center have been coalition racing and scenarios. Now let's define these games.

The coalition type of game is a game where you have cooperative solutions by players. This type of game is useful in helping game players become aware of their values and the dynamics of group decision making.

A race is a game where you have a player or players participating in a situation where the object is to get from point "A" (the beginning) to point "B" (the finish) as fast as possible. This type of game is useful in pre- and post-training evaluations.

Scenario is a game where you have a player or players participating in a situation or a series of situations in which the players are expected to develop solutions to problems based on previous experience and training. This type of game is useful in evaluating the knowledge and learning of participants based on training. This type of game is also useful in evaluating training methods. Another use of this game is to test and evaluate present rules or procedures or future rules and procedures for handling certain situations.

In developing a game as a technique in developing growth or evaluating the participants or training methods, there are five factors to be considered:

1. Reframing: Is it possible to take the training or situation and change it to a game construct, i.e., freshman orientation is a process of orienting freshmen to a university setting, learning about various university requirements, services and building locations. Once you learn about these things your orientation is finished. To change this situation into a game construct

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you could develop a racing type of game where the participants would move from point "A" to point "B" by answering questions about university requirements, services and building locations. The participants who finish win the game (the U.S.F. Orientation Game).

2. Reality: Can the game be developed in such a way that it can deal with real issues in a safe context, i.e., in the U.S.F. Orientation Game if you miss a question it's okay, because it's just a game and the information is accessible the next time around.

3. Involvement: By turning this situation into a game, will you be able to get the participants involved by developing a game that is fun, fast moving and interesting, i.e., in the U.S.F. Game you have elements of competition and luck of the draw.

4. Insight: Will the game allow the participants to see themselves, others and their issues from other perspectives, i.e., the U.S.F. Game can allow the participants to see themselves as orientation advisors or as new students. It also allows them to see their own personal reactions when frustrated.

5. Motivation: What will motivate the participant(s) to play the game, i.e., participants will play the U.S.F. Game to become orientation leaders, to prove knowledge and expertise or to win a prize.

Unless the situation can be adapted to these five factors, using a game or gaming type construct would not be appropriate.

If the situation can be adapted into a game construct, then there are four components to consider in order to design a game. These components are goal of the game, measure of outcome, rules of the game and payoff for the game:

1. Goal of the game. You need to make a determination about what the purpose of the game is. This can be what you want to learn from having people play the game, what the players should learn from playing the game, what playing the game will test. In other words, why are you playing the game? Be specific and concrete in your goal statement. For example, the goal of this game was to present you with a mini game so that we could demonstrate the components of game construction. For example, the U.S.F. Game's goal is to become oriented to the University.

2. Measure of outcome. You need to design an outcome measure. This can be a coding system such as points, money, time spent at a task. For games involving values clarification and group process simple coding procedures are difficult to design. In these types of games, discussing what people learned, strategies they employed and asking for feedback can be used as outcome measures. This type of process can also increase the learning of the players and the game designer. For example, in the U.S.F. Game, increased learning and ability to complete the task.

3. Rules of the game. In designing the rules of the game you need to decide if you want an environmentally rich or environmentally poor game. In an

environmentally poor game, you have many rules that cover almost everything that the players can do. In an environmentally rich game you have few rules and the players can be creative and have more input into how the game can go. To some extent, by having an environmentally rich game where the players are more creative, they tend to personalize the game somewhat more. For example, the rules of this game are that you have to reach agreement, you have limited resources and you have to operate in a group. The U.S.F. Game is an environmentally poor game.

4. Payoff for playing the game. You need to decide what the players get for playing the game. This can be the same as the measure of outcome in some instances. In some games players acquire points that can be exchanged for money. Learning can be a payoff as can be time off from training, access to refreshments or any intangible reward, such as the opportunity to show off. Payoff may effect player motivation, so choose carefully. For example, the payoff in the U.S.F. Game is a diploma of completion.

We have found that by following these factors you can develop an effective game that can either measure personal growth or evaluate training. Once the game has been debugged it is ready for use.

Growth games can enhance self awareness which will increase the possibilities of growth. Games allow others to get in touch with feelings and to see their real selves, versus their idealized selves.

When you are using games as growth technique, the following questions should be asked:

1. What impact did the game have on your self awareness?

2. What two things did you learn about yourself that you judge to be the most beneficial?

3. What characteristic do you feel you should work on, and why?

4. Since playing the game, how do you feel about yourself?

5. If you want to learn more about yourself, do you know where to go for assistance?

Games are an excellent means of evaluating training methods and trainees. Games allow you to see how well your training methods have prepared the trainees to handle the tasks that they are asked to perform. When you are using games to evaluate training methods and trainees, the following questions should be asked:

1. What impact did your training have on the outcome of the game?

2. What two things did you learn from the game regarding your training that you judge to be the most beneficial?

3. What was one thing that was absent from your training that should be included in your next training session?

4. What part of the training did you find to be counterproductive?

5. Did your training prepare your trainees to perform the task?

6. How are present procedures helping or hindering trainees in the performance of their task?

While using games as growth and evaluation techniques has been receiving favorable reactions and results, it is still in the early stages of development. However, we have been observing that people really get involved in the gaming process. Either they really like and enjoy the game, or they become angry and hate it. This reaction depends upon the game's effect on the participant's self-perception, or how they personalize the game. Another set of factors that has to be considered are those of time and money. Games take a lot of time to be developed and debugged, and depending on your gaming strategy can be costly, especially if you are thinking of a computer game. Keeping these factors in mind, we are always asking ourselves if the time and cost of developing the game will equal the outcome, i.e., growth and understanding.

In conclusion, games or gaming techniques have enhanced the growth and evaluation techniques of the University of San Francisco Counseling Center. By utilizing these games, our staff has been able to increase their awareness and understanding of student needs and issues.

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